

## Studying Urbanism in Copenhagen

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*Travelling and learning from other places, cultures, and experiences is a fundamental aspect of education. Copenhagen, Denmark's progressive capital and one of Europe's most livable cities, has long been a laboratory for sustainable planning and design ideas. Seniors Laura Traffenstedt and Justin Wong comment on their experiences studying urbanism in Copenhagen at the Danish Institute for Study Abroad - DIS.*

### Laura's Experience

Following my junior year in the City and Regional Planning Department at Cal Poly San Luis Obispo, I registered for a month-long summer program with the DIS in Copenhagen, Denmark. I always knew I would study abroad, but I was elated when I found a course related to my major. Copenhagen, a city that was entirely off my radar before, became my dream city; it has been implementing essential urban design concepts and techniques that made it my own City Planner's heaven.

At the DIS I took Bicycle Urbanism, a class overall that looked at the best ways a city can encourage and accommodate bicycle traffic in the present and future. We used Copenhagen as our primary case study and examined how the city has been integrating bicycling into urban planning and design. The course focused on the hardware and software of creating a bike-friendly community while looking into the spatial components of creating a bikable city, effects of bike use on health and environment, policies for developing bicycle infrastructure and programs, and best practices in bicycle facility design and implementation.

The course was set up so we would have lectures in the mornings, and in the afternoon, our professors, Josh and Bettina, would take us on a bike ride in the city to show us how these bicycle policies and plans were implemented in Copenhagen. We were also able to see that they worked. Jan Gehl, a Danish architect and urban design consultant, focused his career on improving urban-life and integrates humanity into urban design. It was easy to see the human-focused design elements and to see that the city was made to human scale.

During the course, we took a week study tour to the Netherlands to compare the biking techniques and use of public spaces between the two countries. We visited Amsterdam, Rotterdam, Utrecht, and Houten during our five days in the Neth-



Figure 1: Laura with her classmates during a field trip pose at Museumplein, a famous public space in Amsterdam, Netherlands.

Figure 2: Public spaces in Copenhagen, Denmark are great examples of human scale and social settings.



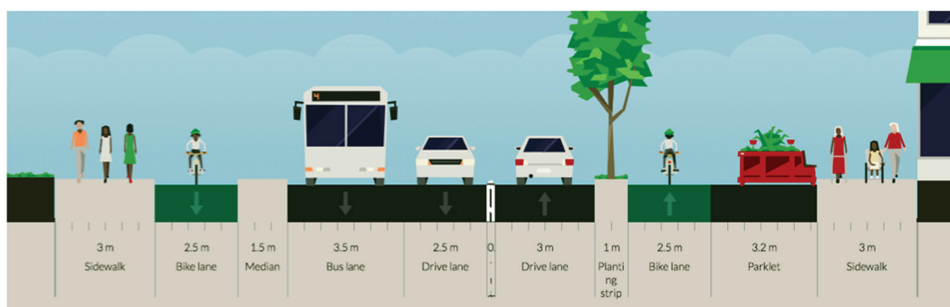


Figure 3: Proposed section for the redesign of Massachusetts Ave focused on MIT's campus.

Figure 4: Laura "learning by doing" while biking in Copenhagen, Denmark.

erlands. The main difference between the biking in the Netherlands and Denmark was that the Netherlands were much more free-flowing which made the bike ride more stressful. Denmark focused on safety and order. Biking there allowed me to clear my mind and enjoy my surroundings. My commutes were more peaceful and low stress which is what I would want commuting to class or work every day in the US as well.

At the end of my time in Copenhagen, our class was tasked with redesigning certain streets in Cambridge, Massachusetts using the techniques and theories explored in the course. My group redesigned Massachusetts Ave and mainly focused on the section of the street that splits MIT's campus in half. Not only was it necessary for us to create a more cohesive campus feel to this block, but we used techniques that would also make it more pedestrian and bike friendly. Our first technique was to repave the street to red brick to match to match the color of the bricks already in place on MIT's campus and seen throughout the sidewalks of Cambridge. This is also used as a traffic slowing technique, making cars notice that they are in a pedestrian zone, and not just driving through another street.

The other significant techniques used were raising the pedestrian walkway as a sort of speed bump, and widening the bike lanes to 2.5 m (8.2 ft). The desired outcome MIT campus will have a stronger sense of togetherness, and more people will spend time in the area thanks to the addition of food trucks and seating. The traffic will be calmer in the area, and the widening and emphasis of safer bike lanes will encourage more people to bike in the area.

After spending a month studying Bicycle Urbanism, I fully realized the significance of the subject. Improving bicycle infrastructure can improve economic vitality, public health, social capital, environmental factors and so much more. This class and my time in Copenhagen strengthened my planning skills, and I feel so grateful for the experience to travel the world while learning what I am so passionate about.

## Justin's Experience

I had the opportunity to spend the Fall Quarter of 2017 studying in Copenhagen, Denmark. Studying abroad has allowed me to gain a broader, more international perspective on urban planning and design, and provided the opportunity to meet many great people, eat amazing food, and experience Copenhagen's world-class bicycle infrastructure.

The program I attended was offered by the DIS, Danish Institute for Study Abroad. It is based in Copenhagen and consists of mostly American and Canadian students. However, there were also several European students who were studying at American schools. At DIS, I was in the Urban Design Studio core course with five more students, and it was an enjoyable and intimate way to learn different urban design principles.

### Preparing for the trip

The preparation leading up to the trip and approving credit transfers was indeed time-consuming, and I certainly wished that I had started planning it much sooner than I did. In the beginning, I was on the fence on whether I wanted to study abroad or not. There was so much uncertainty associated with being in a new country and being around new people whom all spoke a different language. The anticipation leading up to the trip was nerve-racking, but also exciting. In the end, I couldn't be happier with my decision to go.

### Homestay

My first week in Denmark was not smooth sailing as I had initially hoped since there were many things to adjust to in a short



period. My first challenge was figuring out how to get to and from class every day. Grocery shopping was also tricky, because everything was packaged differently, and all the food was labeled in Danish. Getting used to the fact that people around me spoke in Danish also took a little while to get used to.

My housing accommodations were quite comfortable. I lived, in a small home with a lovely Peruvian-Danish host family. My host mother was a Danish native and middle school math teacher. My host dad was a retired chef who moved to Denmark from Peru at around age 30. I also had two host siblings, Erling and Rose, who were both about my age. We also had a young family dog named Morpheus, who was always full of energy and ready to welcome me home.

Luckily, my host family was accommodating while I was transitioning to life in Denmark, and always made an effort to spend time with me. I was invited to many family events and parties, and I was treated like another member of the family. On some weekends we would cook together and my family would take me on short trips to smaller towns around Copenhagen to see less-known, local attractions. I believe that the homestay gave me a more prosperous and immersive cultural experience, allowing me to experience things that many students living in different settings would not have had the opportunity to.

### Getting Around

My home was in a quiet suburb called Greve, about 40 minutes east of Copenhagen by train. The commute was long but enjoyable. The trains were comfortable and the service was frequent, making it very convenient to get to and from the city. My commute also gave me plenty of time to do some reading or get homework done on my way to the city. An additional perk of taking the train is that they allowed bikes on the trains at no additional cost, further shortening my commute to and from school.

### Urban Design Studio

Every DIS student's schedule consisted of a 6-unit core course and several 3-unit supplemental courses. The Urban Design Studio core course consisted of four other students, including one other from Cal Poly's CRP department. The other three students had architecture or landscape architecture backgrounds, which diversified the expertise of the students in the class and allowed us to learn from each other.

Working in this studio was an interesting but challenging experience because Copenhagen was the first large city I had worked in. It introduced many new challenges that were not present in the types of projects we had been exposed to in our Cal Poly studios. Some of the challenges included considering



Figure 1: Justin at the top of Copenhagen's tallest church spire.

Copenhagen's extensive public transportation network, higher densities, existing urban spaces, and especially the community's love for bicycling. Because the city's streetscape, population, and overall preferences were so different, I had very different design goals and objectives in mind.

Our uniquely small class size gave us the opportunity to work very closely with our instructor Rasmus Frisk, an architect and urban designer. Some days, before starting the studio work, he gave short presentations on drawing, project representation, and other graphic communication techniques. On other days, we would go on mini mobile lectures throughout the city to see different urban design projects. On the studio days, Rasmus always made sure to save enough time to work with each of us and provide feedback tailored to our individual needs.

The kind of work we completed in this studio was relatively very similar to the work we completed back at Cal Poly. We did two urban design projects: a redesign of a small square in the central city, and a large master plan in the northern harbor. I really appreciated that in this studio we had the freedom to choose how we wanted to present our work. Our project had no 'minimum requirements', which meant that we could present our work in any format we wanted. For example, we could entirely omit our section drawings as long as we showed the side dimensions in another way, such as an isometric drawing. As long as our audience was able to understand our work and we were able to stand behind our choices, we had the freedom to do almost anything.

A particularity about this studio was that we were all required to submit our own work. While I understand the advantages of that, particularly for the grading process, I also believe that there is a lot to learn through collaboration on projects.

In addition to the regular day trips that our class went on, our core course had a week-long study tour to Germany and Switzerland. Conducted by the Architecture and Design Department this tour included students from the Urban Design, Architecture, Studio Art, and Furniture Design Programs. We visited unique architectural pearls, art museums, repurposed industrial facilities, designer furniture factories and other unique urban spaces.

### Transportation in Urban Europe

Another class that I took was called Transportation in Europe. At first, I wasn't sure if I would learn anything by taking this it because I had already taken a basic transportation class back at Cal Poly, and this class was geared towards non-urban planning students. However, what I learned far exceeded my expectations. Because not all the students in this class were planning majors, each had different perspectives on transportation; they had very diverse educational backgrounds, including: neuroscience, psychology, architecture, and urban planning. Although some of the material may have been similar to the Cal Poly curriculum i, there was a lot to learn from other students.

Compared to the CRP transportation class, this class at DIS had a much heavier focus on public transportation and active transportation modes. We were also able to go out and physically ride each transportation mode to make observations about what worked and what didn't work well. Our final project was to create a 'serious game' about transportation and present it at the end of year showcase. This was a very educational experience because it made us think about how to communicate different planning issues and ideas in a way that is simple enough for the community to understand.

### Final Thoughts

I had an incredible experience in Copenhagen. Being immersed in a foreign culture was terrifying but life-changing. Not only did I get a chance to spend a semester in a different country, but I was able to learn about differences in planing, transit infrastructure, culture, and teaching styles. Having the opportunity to live and travel in Europe was amazing. I loved the experience and I can't wait for my next adventure.

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Figure 2: Justin's project, showing a collage of the anticipated uses of an enclosed area located adjacent to the canal running through the site.

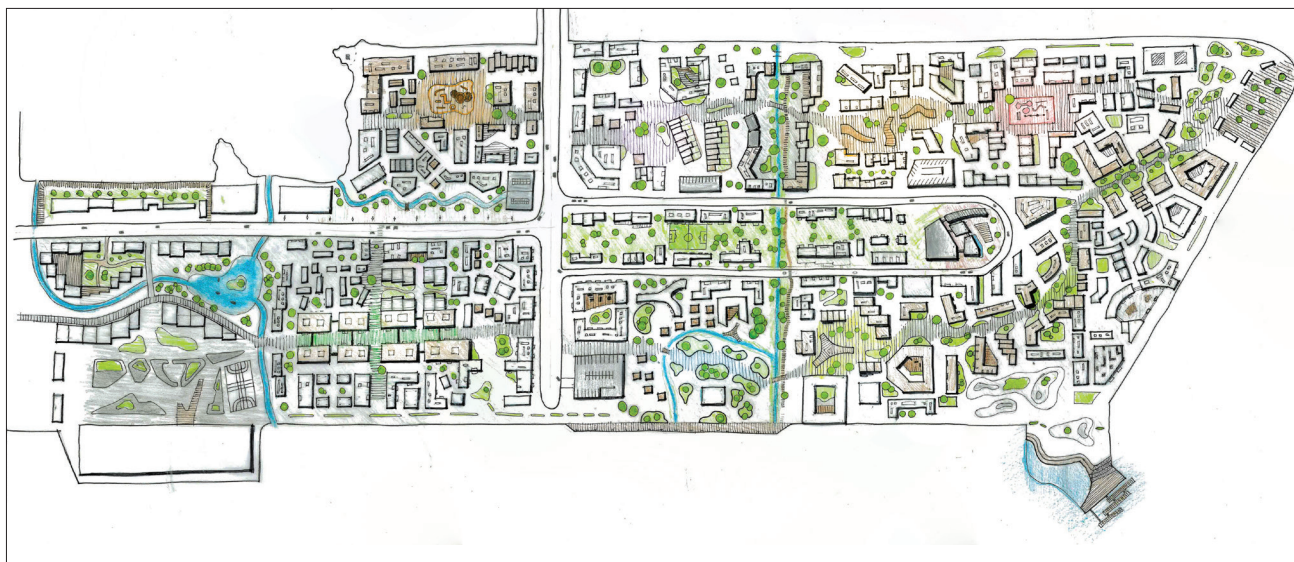


Figure 3: Plan view of Justin's proposed masterplan development.